

next couple of days. There will not be any hiding. If you voted in Iraq today, your finger will be stained today and tomorrow, but your life will be changed henceforth.

Maybe we can learn from them. We didn't have a 60- or 70-percent turnout in our election. I don't know exactly what the turnout was, but I am sure it is much less than that in America where we don't vote if the weather is not good or the traffic is too bad. But in Iraq they walked to the polling places, they put their lives on the line, and they were thrilled to be able to be a part of a historic event, of democracy in action, and they came out and danced in the streets. They said: We are very happy. They also said: Thank you, America.

A lot of credit can be passed out. It begins with the people of Iraq for what they did yesterday, to the men and women who are trying to make Iraq safe, their own policemen and national guard, and their own military. But a lot of credit goes to our military men and women who have done a marvelous job on the ground in Iraq. Even yesterday, they were there. They helped provide as much security as they could, but they were not interfering with the voters. They backed away. They left it to the people of Iraq and to their military and police and others.

I cannot give enough credit to the young men and women who have been there and their officers and noncoms, all of them, soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and Coast Guard. Obviously, they have all been a part of this. When I have talked to the young troops we have there, they are proud of what they are doing. They feel patriotic about what they have helped to do there.

Then, yesterday, they saw this begin to bear fruit. It doesn't mean the Iraqi people are free from terrorism. It doesn't mean everything has been done perfectly. It doesn't mean it is going to be perfect from here on. We don't know yet who won their election. It was a very complicated process. They had to figure out who to vote for or what list of people to vote for, and what number to identify. They still have a long way to go in cultivating their democracy. But for me, it was an inspiration. I was thrilled by what I saw, what I witnessed through the media. Not just one network or one station, all the different ones that were there in the country, showing democracy at work.

But also I believe credit has to go to our own Congress and the American people for showing patience and forbearance and giving of their treasure and American blood for a distant place, for people you don't really know. Many wonder, I am sure, sometimes, is it worth it? Why are we there? How long are we going to be there? All those questions come forward. But what struck me again yesterday was how people react to freedom, how people react to democracy, being able to go and cast their vote. It is liberating.

The President was right when he talked about the power of freedom and

democracy and how it is a flame that is igniting a fire all around the world over the last 20 years. We have gone from about 20 democracies in the world to 118 countries all over the world, in every continent, in places where you would not have thought it would be possible: Mongolia, elections in Ukraine, elections by the Palestinians. There is something very special going on here. I do believe it is contagious and that it will continue to grow, and not only the American people but the people of the world will benefit.

The odds of having an attack from people in a country where there is a democracy are much less than those who come from places where there is an oppressive government, dictatorship, or authoritarianism. Democracy is not perfect; it is evolutionary. We know that from what we experienced. But yesterday was a special moment. I hope the American people saw it, felt proud of what they were witnessing and the part we have played in making that day possible.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota is recognized.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, I rise today to discuss the future of Social Security. In recent weeks we have heard a lot about the President's intent to establish private accounts under the program. While no details have been shared with Members of Congress regarding his proposal, the limited information we have does indicate that the administration will only push and support a long-term solvency fix if it is married with a plan to divert payroll taxes to individual private accounts.

Beyond the private account issue, it is unclear what the other details of the Bush plan will include. I am willing to work with the President and Members of Congress to improve the long-term outlook of this program, but the American people need to be clear in their understanding of the facts. The fact is, Social Security is not in crisis and private accounts will do nothing to help with the program's solvency. Yes, we do need to think about the future of this program. I am willing to hear the President's thoughts and work with him on this issue, but I will not support any efforts to dismantle a program that has protected millions in this country from poverty, and provided a guaranteed benefit for our most vulnerable citizens in their time of need.

Social Security is the most important social insurance program ever created by this great nation, and it has provided seniors with the assurances they need in old age.

In South Dakota, one in five people count on this program to put food on their table, buy their prescription drugs, and keep the heat running during the long cold winters. The program

protects millions from poverty, and without it, the number of seniors living in poverty would rise from 10 percent to 50 percent. This is the mark of a strong safety net program and we must fight to ensure its longevity.

While in the long-term we do need to find a sound solution to protect the solvency of the Social Security program, one thing must be protected now—the guarantee to retirees that they do not have to worry about living in poverty in old age, no matter what they made during their working years or how long they live. Seniors must be given the security to know to the dime what they will receive under this program, rather than having to worry about the climate on Wall Street.

Since President Bush began his campaign for private accounts under Social Security, he has tried to convince the American people that the program is in crisis. This manufactured crisis is merely fiction and when you begin to look at the real numbers, you learn very quickly that his numbers just do not add up.

The administration has been trying to tell an alarming story in which the program is broke in 2019. Reality tells us that in 2019 we will just begin to dip into the \$3.7 trillion dollar trust fund to pay the Social Security bills and we will be able to draw on that fund for a long time—until 2052 according to the Congressional Budget Office.

At that point in time, seniors will still receive 80 percent of projected benefits, and still more in dollars adjusted for inflation than what beneficiaries get today.

The real fiscal crisis facing our Government today is not in the Social Security program, but rather in the Federal budget, which according to the administration will reach a deficit of \$427 billion dollars in 2005. This is the result of the irresponsible decisions of the administration that has pushed tax cuts for the wealthy during time of war and continued to fight to make those tax cuts permanent. I was alarmed to learn that in fact the entire Social Security shortfall over the next 75 years is about one-fifth the cost of the Bush tax cuts if made permanent. Beyond these problems, the rising costs of our health care programs will continue to threaten our budget stability. This is the real crisis we are facing right now.

At the end of the day, when you look at the numbers and the financial outlook for Social Security, we are in good shape for at least the next 50 years if not longer. When I look at the budget deficit today and a potential crisis 50 years from now, I am more concerned about ensuring that our Government can continue to pay its bills now and restore fiscal sanity to the Federal Government so we can honor our commitments in the near term—for soldiers in Iraq, for insurance coverage for the poor and for prescription drugs for seniors.

In the short term, the administration's plan to establish private accounts will actually increase our budget deficit and cost the Federal Government approximately \$2 trillion dollars over the next 10 years. He has not indicated how he would pay for that, and so that number just gets added onto the Federal debt, not even accounting for whatever privatization will cost us in the following years. Estimates indicate that this increased borrowing, primarily from foreign nations—Japan, China and others—could potentially double our publicly-held debt by 2041, further increasing our dependence on foreign creditors.

Yes, any long-term savings the administration plan might create will be at the expense of providing seniors and all Americans a guaranteed benefit.

I do believe that we should at least start a discussion about the long-term solvency of Social Security and we should explore all options for addressing this issue. I support encouraging Americans to establish private accounts only that are above and beyond what we do in Social Security right now. All of our citizens deserve a shot at a comfortable life in their old age.

To get there we need to create a sturdy stool—a retirement security stool that provides a solid leg through a secure, guaranteed Social Security benefit; another leg helps protect the health and long-term health care needs of all people; and a third encourages individuals to save money for their retirement years, through private accounts, pensions and other programs. These are the things we should be thinking about as we look to the future.

So what we have is a Social Security program right now that is solid, according to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, through the year 2052, through the middle of this century. Even at the end of 2052, those payments for young people today would actually be higher, adjusted for inflation, than the monthly payments that today's recipients get. So is this a crisis? No. There is a problem, but there is not a crisis in the long term for Social Security.

What concerns me is that I think some of the proposals I am hearing about have more to do with ideology, more to do with trying to move the Government away from providing that safety net than it does to actually solving what problems that may exist.

I believe our seniors in South Dakota and across this country deserve to have a Social Security program with a defined benefit, that they will know to the dime what it is they are going to get when they retire, and that it is not contingent on whether the market had a good year or bad year in their runup time prior to their retirement. That defined benefit ought to be the cornerstone, ought to be the foundation, of every retirement. Whatever else happens, they should know that will be there, and that it does not involve a gamble in the stock market.

I believe people ought to be saving more; that they ought to be provided better mechanisms to set aside money which they can count on that will be over and above Social Security, that will augment Social Security. I think we need to have a good discussion about IRAs and 401(k)s and other kinds of pension mechanisms that will allow for private savings to augment Social Security.

But at the end of the day, the best thing this Government can do for the long-term solvency of Social Security is to get our annual budget into equilibrium so we can get back to where we were only 4 years ago—with budget surpluses rather than utilizing Social Security surplus dollars for the ordinary expenses of Government; and, that we put ourselves in a still stronger position midway through this century to make sure every American gets the benefits to which they are entitled and which they expect to have.

I look forward to working with President Bush and with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle on ways in which we can assist with the near-term crisis in Medicare, Medicaid, health care, the near-term crisis in terms of the budget deficit which our Nation faces, and the longer term problem that we have with Social Security, but in so doing I will not abandon the underlying philosophy of every American having a defined benefit program that will be the foundation of their retirement plan and on which they can, in fact, count.

I look forward to a constructive and positive debate. Doing nothing is not the solution. But concocting false crises with remedies which actually make a situation worse than it is now cannot possibly be the road that this Congress, this Senate wants to go down.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. THUNE). The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. THOMAS. Thank you, Mr. President.

CHALLENGES BEFORE CONGRESS

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, it is again time, as we begin this session of Congress, when challenges are before us—the opportunity to work on programs, some of which we worked on before and did not complete, some of which need to be worked on and haven't; such things as energy policy, of course, which we have worked on for some time. We are becoming more and more dependent as time goes by and as our consumption increases and our production does not.

The highway bill we talked about for a good long time. It is most important for our economy, for our jobs, for our transportation, and we haven't been able to handle it in the last couple of years; to move into something such as the class action activity that we are committed to so that we are not moving the liability claims around to different States to find a jurisdiction that is most favorable; and to do something

about tax simplification. We always talk about that. The Tax Code is that thick, and yet we continue to have it.

We have a real opportunity to do a number of things, and I hope we are able to do that. I hope we are able to have an honest debate and discussion. We did have different points of view, obviously, but I hope we move towards finding solutions to coming together better than perhaps we have in the past.

In addition—I guess this is really what I would like to comment about briefly today—I think we also have an opportunity and a responsibility to take a look at some of the existing programs, many of which have been in place far too long a time; indeed, maybe they should be. On the other hand, I think from time to time we need to have some kind of a system where we go back and take a look at older programs and see, as time changes, if those programs are still efficient, necessary, and as opportune as they were in the beginning.

We have new programs all the time, and we tend not to take a look at some of the ones that are in place to see indeed if they are still needed, to see if they do the job as well as they have been, and to see if they are as efficient as they can be.

I have in my desk a notebook that is nearly that thick with all the programs the Federal Government has in place. There are actually thousands of programs that are in place. Some are major and some are not, but nevertheless they are there. We are talking about balancing the budget and so on. Some of that ought to reflect the expenditures which have been going on for a long time, and still continue to go on.

Of course, when you have a program out there, the nature of it is that people get involved and it develops its own constituency which makes it difficult to change from time to time. I hope we can do some reevaluations of the ones that we have. We have some programs that obviously need to be changed.

The Senator from South Dakota was talking about Social Security. Obviously, it needs to be changed. He argues about whether it is a crisis, but the fact is, for one thing all the money that is in the so-called trust fund is not in the trust fund at all. There are IOUs in there that have to be repaid. In order to go beyond the 20-, 13-, or 18-year program that we talk about in order get to the 45-year program, that money has to be in place.

There are some ideas about doing that. Of course, a number of things could be done. Payments could be attached to the benefits' costs rather than to inflation, and a number of things. They will all be considered, of course.

There seems to be a lot of reaction to the so-called personal accounts. I think one thing that has to be considered by everyone who is interested, No. 1, people who are 55 or so are not affected at